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ABSTRACT

This supplement summarizes the National Commission on Excellence in Education's final report "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" and offers guidelines for citizens interested in forming their own commission on excellence. Resource organizations and publications for local commissions are listed. Theses and recommendations of the report of the Twentieth Century Fund's Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, the report of the Education Commission of the States' Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, and the College Board's statement concerning academic preparation for college are succinctly recounted. The supplement also contains a letter describing the reception of the reports and provides editorial commentary urging citizens to upgrade the nation's schools. (RH)

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Where Schools Stand

How to Form Your Own Commission on Excellence

Carl L. Marburger

The National Committee for Citizens in Education is delighted that public schools have now become the focus of attention of so many people. The media are playing up every politician's statement, and as you can tell from these materials, all manner of commissions and task forces have published, or are about to release reports, on the condition of the public schools. Most of them give the schools near failing grades, and too many want to find an easy answer, a quick way to fix what's wrong with the schools.

Delighted as we are with all the publicity, we are also concerned that all the fuss and all the reports are coming from:

- political figures
- educators
- college presidents
- leaders of industry

We find almost no consideration for the opinions of parents or average citizens or students, let alone any involvement of the owners, users, and consumers of the public schools.

We believe that NOW IS THE TIME for those parents and citizens and students to make their voices heard. One way to do that is for them, hopefully in collaboration with school people (or without them, if necessay), to form their own local Commissions on Educational Excellence.

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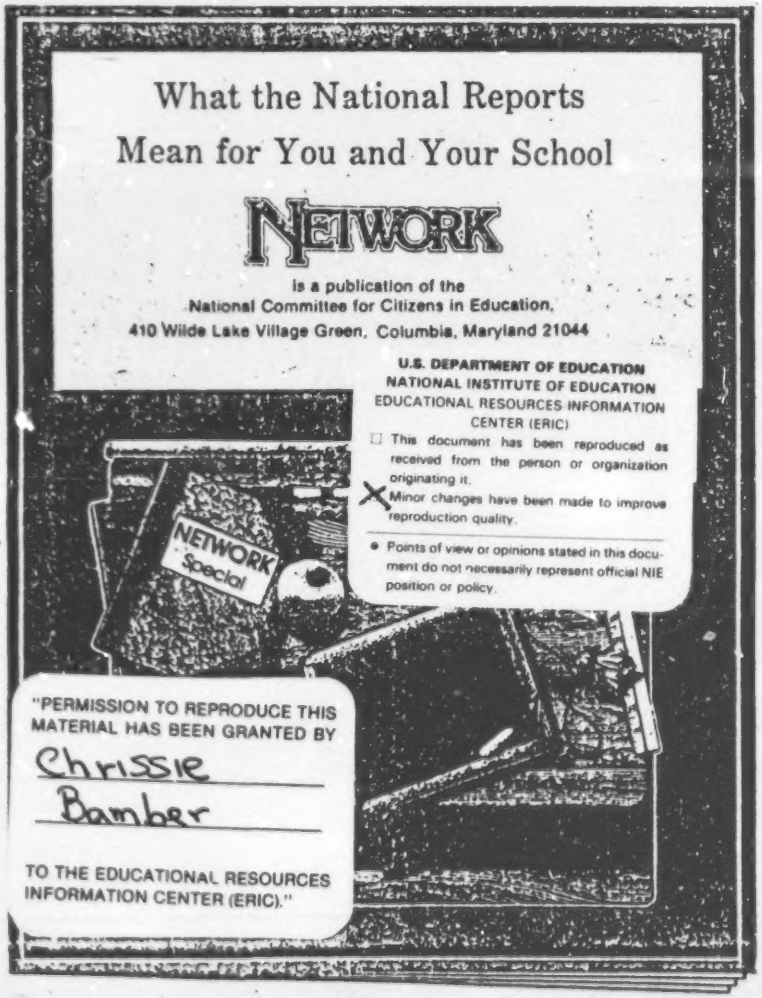
What the National Reports
Mean for You and Your School
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A summary

A Nation at Risk

Report of the National Commission of Excellence in Education. Appointed by: U.S. Department of Education

"Mediocre" is the rating the nation's schools get from this blue ribbon committee, a status that keeps students from reaching their full potential, hinders national industry and threatens national security.

"For the first time in the history of our country the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents."

The signs are unmistakable – falling test scores, a rise in remedial college courses and more training needed in the workplace – but the causes of our educational decline are controllable: "weakness of purpose, confusion of vision, underuse of talent and lack of leadership."

Findings lay blame on "a curricular smorgasbord" and "minimum(s)" (standards) which have become "maximums."

American students attend fewer hours of school, take fewer basic courses and have less homework than students in other industrial countries. Teacher candidates get too much education theory and not enough background in their subject areas. Salaries are too low and the cream of the teaching force is being skimmed off by industry, especially in math and science.

The Commission carefully avoided politics in making these specific recommendations:

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Schools are Center Stage

Fellow workers in the cause of better public schools,

This is our year. The spotlight is on education, and there has seldom been a better time to push local campaigns to improve schools.

No fewer than a dozen major study groups have chosen this year to assess the state of public schooling in America and make recommendations for upgrading it.

Since the U.S. Department of Education's blue ribbon commission published its report, "A Nation at Risk," in April, education has been front-page news. Governors, legislators, teachers' unions, and presidential candidates have all gotten into the act, reacting to published reports and offering their own solutions to declining school quality.

What a change! In the past several yeas, what national coverage of schools there was, was filled with gloom. Declining enrollment and test scores, slashed school funding, state bailouts and even scattered district bankruptcies made headlines. At the national level, public school advocates put all their energy into salvaging what they could of federal programs destined for extinction. Major victories were preventing further cuts in Chapter 1 funds and staving off tuition tax credits which would further defund public schools. But petition for new and better initiatives? Forget it. There wasn't a chance. "Belt tightening," getting by with less," "survival," were the themes in education in the late '70 s and early '80s.

Has all that changed? It's too soon to tell. National study groups are calling for more of everything for schools, but where the resources will come from is yet to be seen. A new federal commitment to public schools (at least in dollars and cents) remains doubtful. Many states and localities are still hampered by high unemployment, an eroding tax base or tax-limiting legislation. Teachers and other professional groups are resisting change. In many parts of the country, there is no consensus about what schools should be doing, much less how to accomplish it. But at least we citizens who want to make changes, now have the attention of those who have the power to make them. Suddenly, schooling has become the national priority it should have been all along. Now it's our job to use that emphasis to advantage before the limelight fades.

The issues that have catapulted education into its current prominence are declining economy and a concern for the national defense. Of all the criticisms leveled at schools lately, the one that has hit home has been the complaints of armed forces and private employers that recent high school graduates lack the basic academic skills they need to do their jobs. Coming at a time when the demand for American industrial products is down and other countries are catching up to us in military might, these educational deficiences, rightly or wrongly, are getting the blame.

Concern for U.S. dominance is behind the national drive to improve schools, but for many of the rest of us, **the simple proposition that every child can learn and deserves the best education American know how can provide is sufficient reason for action.**

For 10 years NCCE has been urging local communities to involve citizens (including parents) in school decisions that affect children. The new national visibility for schools may provide that opportunity.

Our organization suggests that you in local schools and school districts form your own commissions on excellence in education composed of parents, citizens and school personnel. use the recommendations of national experts as the basis for local discussion and debate, but reach your own conclusions about what to do locally to upgrade schools. There is no one best school system, and only you as local people can determine what you need, what you can afford and what you can agree on.

This special section of NETWORK is designed to help you get started. We have summarized four of the major reports which have been issued so far and listed others you can expect in the coming year. There is a list of basic steps to take to form a local commission on excellence and resources to assist you. In addition, members of NCCE have commented on the usefulness of national recommendations.

Already, a number of states and local school districts have responded to national appeals to improve schools. If you are successful in forming a local commission for this purpose we'd like to hear from you

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How to Form Your Own Commission on Excellence

The following is a basic how-to-do-it-procedure--How to set up a local commission on educational excellence. Each community, each school within a community, is unique. Each has its own political issues, its own social/ethnic/age mix, and its own special strengths and weaknesses. So, all this can be is a guide. You, each of you, must decide together what you want your commission on education excellence to be, and to do.

AT YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL

1. Decide whether you wish to start a local school Commission on Educational Excellence (CEE).
   (If your answer is NO, go to #11.)
   If your answer is YES, go to #2.)

2. Seek out other parents / citizens / students who wish to join you in setting up a CEE.

3. Decide collaboratively what you want a CEE to do. What is its purpose? Do you have specific goals you want to accomplish? What is a tentative timetable?

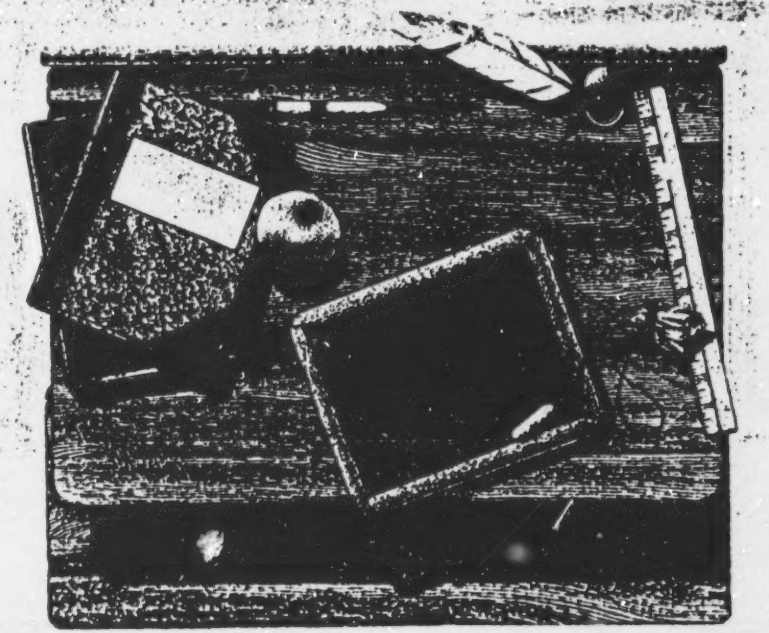
4. Meet (either as a group or by representation) with the principal and ask her (him) to invite some representative teachers and/or support persons (clerk, custodian, etc.) to the meeting.

5. Do NOT be demanding.
   Do NOT be defensive.
   DO indicate that we all have only one goal: the best education for all children.

6. Solicit support for the CEE.
   (If there is no support, or if the reaction is purely defensive, or stone-walling or delays seem inevitable, go to #10.)
   If support is there, work out the following:
   A. Time to meet.
   B. Joint agenda setting, with probable first item(s) agreement on a mission or purpose statement, and some goals.
   C. Make arrangements for a chairperson, recorder (perhaps temporarily on a rotating basis.) (Do NOT automatically turn to the principal as chair.)

7. At first meeting, suggest some manner of needs assessment.
   (That is jargon for finding out what is now going on in the school, and what do we like best, and what would we change.)
   At that same meeting it would be wise to begin a process for learning what other parents and citizens believe about the school. A simple telephone survey or opinion poll would provide you with valuable information and increase the support for the work of the CEE.

8. Make plans for enlarging the group. (Involve an active PTA, PTO, PTSO from the beginning, if that is right for your community.)



9. Tackle an "excellence" problem that is solvable, e.g., "How can we upgrade our elementary science programs?, or "What can we in the community do to provide worthwhile work experiences for children?
   Remember, the professional educators have teaching skills, and they are experts at that. You have special knowledge of your children and your community, and only you know what you want for your children, so you are the experts there. A CEE can combine that expertise.

10. If the principal is unwilling to cooperate, then:
    Do 1-5 above, and then schedule a meeting with the superintendent of schools and members of the board of education. Ask then for help in working with the local school, or in establishing a CEE for the district, along with representatives from other schools.
    If you still meet great resistance, then your only alternative is political. Work for a change in the school board, and in the administration of the system.

11. IF you do not wish to work on a CEE at the local school level, then one option is to establish one at the district level. All of the same steps apply, only with broader representation from all the schools, or by district, and you will be working with the superintendent or representative and the school board.

When you are involved in the education of children, they go to better schools, and they do better in school.

NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT!

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Resources for Local Commissions

If you are starting a local commission on educational excellence, the following materials may be helpful to you. Contact publishers directly to obtain copies or check with your local library.

Phi Delta Kappa

8th and Union Ave., Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402

What Schools are For, John L. Goodlad (1979) 127 pp softcover, $5.50.

Discusses our public school tradition, what the educational aims and schools goals are and should be, and how to improve the schools we have. "We are all accountable for the condition of our schools. This is no time for us to become either defensive or critical of the shortcomings of others. It is the time for all of us to join in reconstructing the common school."

National School Relations Association

1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, VA. 22209

Good Schools: What Makes Them Work, Cindy Tursman (1981) 96pp softcover, $15

Reviews research, examines many factors related to school effectiveness, including leadership, curriculum, and instruction, and identifies a number of successful schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Concludes that "schools are only as effective as the people and ideas which shape them."

Good Teachers: What to Look For, Cindy Tursman (1981) 96 pp softcover, $15.

an important companion piece to the *Good Schools* book, focussing on the most critical aspect ofeffective schools, what goes on between teacher and learner in the classroom. The bulk of this manual is devoted to methods of effective instruction and classroom management balanced with testimonials from master teachers.

Institute for Responsive Education

605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215

Education for All People: A Grassroots Primer, Jane deGroot ed. (1980) 155 pp softcover, $6.00

A manual for parents, citizens, and grass roots organizations emphasizing how and where to get information and what kinds of information grass roots groups need if they are to be effective. Includes chapter on "How to Evaluate Your Child's School."

Facts for a Change: Citizen Action-Research for Better Schools, Bill Burges (1976) 191 pp softcover, $5.00.

Includes chapters on how groups can organize for action-research on an issue that concerns them; fact-finding methods for action-research, from stating the issue as a researchable problem to analyzing the facts; and strategies for follow-up from developing proposals to dealing with opposition.

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Report of the Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy

Appointed by: The Twentieth Century Fund, an independent foundation specializing in research

Public schools are in "trouble," and this group of scholars and educators agrees a new federal policy is needed to help turn them around.

In recent years, schools have gotten more money, but not nearly enough to accomplish the bigger job they have been asked to do. Racial strife, student violence, drug use, rising divorce rates, increased immigration and a mandate to better serve "hard-to-educate" students have made teaching in schools harder.

In recent years, the federal "emphasis on promoting equality of opportunity in the public schools has meant a slighting of its commitment to educational quality."

"But equality and excellence are not mutually exclusive objectives. The federal government must continue to help meet the special needs of poor and minority students, while taking the lead in meeting the general and overwhelming need for educational quality. Federal education policy must function...in ways that complement rather than weaken local control."

Recommendations for appropriate federal policy in the '80s give special attention to the influx of non-English-speaking children, the implications for all students of living in a multi-lingual society, and the special burdens on school districts with large numbers of immigrants.

The new federal policy should:

- Emphasize the need for better schools and a better education for all young Americans.
- Fund a national Master Teachers Program that recognizes and rewards teaching excellence.
- Recognize that literacy in the English language is the most important school objective.
- Shift federal bilingual funds to teach non-English-speaking children to speak, read and write English.
- Promote and support proficiency in English for all children in the public schools, but especially for those who do not speak English, or have only limited command of it.
- Promote proficiency in a second language for every American public school student.
- Emphasize programs to develop basic scientific literacy among all citizens and to provide advanced training in science and mathematics for secondary school students.
- Continue support for special educational programs for the poor and handicapped.
- Pay for categorical programs required by the federal government from the federal treasury.
- Shift federal "impact aid" from the children of U.S. military personnel to school districts with substantial numbers of immigrant children.
- Give federal attention and assistance to areas with concentrations of immigrant or impoverished children, and to those schools making strong efforts to improve their performance.

Academic Prep for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able To Do

Statement by the College Board. A part of its 10-year Educational Equality Project

To succeed in college, students need a solid background in reading, writing, speaking and listening, mathematics, reasoning, and study. In addition, a level of competency should be achieved in high school in each of six basic academic subjects and computers.

These are:

ENGLISH: the ability towrite, speak and listen, and use language correctly and appropriately.

THE ARTS: a basic understanding and appreciation of the visual arts, theater, music and dance, with an intensive knowledge of at least one of these.

MATHEMATICS: in-depth knowledge of algebra, geometry and functions; the ability to use computers and calculators and a knowledge of statistics; a second more challenging level of preparation, including calculus, for students who expect to major in such fields as engineering, economics, pre-medicine, computer science, or the natural sciences.

A Nation at Risk

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- Increase high school graduation requirements to include four years of English; three years of mathematics, science, and social studies; one-half year of computer science; and two years of foreign language for college-bound students.
- Increase standards and expectations for academic performance and student conduct; upgrade and update textbooks; raise admission standards for colleges.
- Lengthen school day to 7 hours and the school year to 200-220 days; assign more homework.
- Raise standards in teacher education programs; require teachers to work 11 months; tie higher salaries to evaluation, including peer review; create "career ladders" that differentiate between beginning, experienced, and master teachers; provide incentives for teacher trainees in fields where shortages exist.
- Citizens provide financial support and hold elected officials and educators accountable for reforms.

Everyone, including parents and the federal government, is assigned a role in bringing these recommendations into schools. The parent role is to instill in the student the value of education, to oversee his schoolwork, to demand that schools give your child the best, and to become active in schools; the federal role is to cooperate with states and localities to help the students who are most at risk (the gifted and talented, the disadvantaged, minorities, the handicapped).

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Action for Excellence

Report of the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth Convened by: The Education Commission of the States

Our nation faces a real "emergency" in economic terms because of declining educational quality. That is the conclusion of this consortium of governors, business, labor and education leaders.

A National Assessment showing student problem-solving skills are declining is one critical indicator that America is falling behind other countries. A decline in basic courses and a lack of consensus about what needs to be done to improve two schools are two causes.

The Task Force acknowledges the importance of a strong federal commitment to education, but focuses its report on action at the state and local levels. That is where members' expertise and power lie. New alliances between schools and the private sector are needed, and local school/business partnerships are recommended. Like members of the Task Force, schools, and businesses should set aside their separate interests and learn to build bridges, not barriers, to communication. "If the business community gets more involved in both the design and the delivery of education, we are going to become more competitive as an economy."

Their eight-point action plan includes the following:

- Create a broad-based Task Force on Education for Economic Growth in each state.
- Create broader and more effective partnerships with schools; include business.
- Use existing resources better.
- Improve methods of recruiting, training and paying teachers; create "career ladders" for teachers; improve pre-service and inservice training, and devise new forms of teacher recognition.
- Establish firm, explicit and demanding requirements for discipline, homework, and grades; strengthen curriculum and increase the time and intensity devoted to learning.
- Create systems for fairly and objectively measuring teacher effectiveness; improve the certification process; periodically test student achievement; upgrade college entrance requirements.
- Improve school leadership and management.
- Better serve students who are now unserved or underserved.

SCIENCE: core skills including laboratory and field work and detailed knowledge in at least one area; biology, chemistry, physics, earth science or one of the newer interdisciplinary sciences.

SOCIAL STUDIES: social and cultural as well as political history, with special attention paid to a global perspective; acquaintance with U.S. history and world geography and cultures; at least one of the social sciences, such as economics, political science, geography or sociology.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE: the ability to speak, read and write elementary sentences in a second language as well as to acquire knowledge of the culture, history and life patterns of the society in which the language is spoken; enhanced use of a home language other than English; a more challenging level of preparation for those students considering advanced study in another language or work in a subject requiring knowledge of a second language.

COMPUTERS: a basic understanding of how computers work and some ability to use the computer and appropriate software; also an understanding of the problems and issues confronting individuals and society in the use of computers.

Recent and Upcoming National reports on Public Education

The following reports have been published and can be ordered from NCCE. Send payment with your order. Add $1.00 handling charge to each order. Orders should be addressed to Publications Dept., NCCE, 410 Wilde Lake Village Green, Columbia, Maryland 21044.

Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy
(1983) 21 pp softcover, Twentieth Century Fund, $6.00

A Nation at Risk
(1983) 76 pp softcover, National Commission on Excellence in Education, $4.50.

Action for Excellence: A Comprehensive Plan to Improve Our Nation's Schools. The Report and Recommendations of the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth
(1983) 50 pp softcover, Education Commission of the States, $5.00

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Resources

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All of the following publications may be ordered directly from...

National Committee for Citizens in Education
410 Wilde Lake Village Green, Columbia, MD 21044. Add $1.00 handling charge to each order.

You CAN Improve Your Child's School: Practical Answers to Questions parents Ask Most About Their Public Schools, J. William Rioux (1980) 429 pp hardcover, $6.95.

The emphasis in this book is on responses to the inquiries of individual parents about issues in the public schools. In addition to its 260 pages of basic questions and answers, the book's appendices include lists of organizations, court rulings, legal standards, federal regulations, and state statutes on a number of topics useful to those seeking to gain a basic understanding of issues related to the public school system.

Parents Organizing to Improve Schools (1976) 52 pp softcover, $3.50

Basic guide to organizing and running parent/citizen groups who wish to become active in issues and policies related to the public schools. Outlines steps to be taken for effective parent action. This basic manual could be very useful for initial organizing of a local "commission on excellence."

Effective Schools: How to Evaluate Them: How to Get Them (1980) 45 pp softcover, $3.25

Report on a Symposium on Effective Schools, held April 12-14, 1980 in Elkridge, Maryland, a conference of researchers, parents, and practitioners convened to discuss the issue of improving inner city schools. The insights of the participants provide a valuable perspective on the current movement of assessment and renewal of our public schools.

Your School: How Well is It Working? (1982) 76 pp softcover, $3.50.

Anticipates the national focus on school improvement and provides a valuable resource to those who are beginning the task of evaluating their local schools.
Your School: How Well is It Working? contains basic steps to follow in designing and implementing an action program to assess and improve the schools. Handbook emphasizes practical aspects of the process of evaluation and includes *many* lists of resources, publications, organizations, and strategies for action, including:

- first questions to ask
- how to gather information and determine criteria
- traps to avoid in evaluating schools
- resources for evaluation (books, articles, agencies, consultants)
- where to go for more information

May well be the best initial purchase for a local commission on educational excellence.

Our Readers Respond

It's Good to See Education a "Top Priority" Again

Shirley Oehling and Sue Timmons

Our initial reaction to the recent critical reports on education in the U.S. is excitement and relief. Finally, people with national prominence and political clout are saying what we've been saying for years. "Our students aren't learning all they should be learning. The curriculum is filled with too many irrelevant courses. Not all teachers are doing a great job." Our group organized partly because of such beliefs, and for years we have been pressuring officials in our little corner of the country to do something about it. Now others (on a national level, no less) are saying the same thing. Fantastic.

Ohio's school officials are not quite as enthusiastic in their response to the reports. Their reactions are generally defensive.

"That is a good report with many valid points but it doesn't apply to my district."

"We never left the basics."

"We are above the national average." (Never mind that the national average has been declining.)

One county superintendent blames the failure of the public schools on the emphasis placed in recent years on educating the handicapped. The Ohio School Boards Association points out that our state has already addressed some of the same concerns as the national report. Ohio has initiated an articulation study between secondary schools and colleges, and made recommendations calling for computer science in grades seven and eight, competency testing of teachers, and an extended school day and/or year. (Please note that these recommendations, like those in the national reports, are not in place.)

We feel bolstered by the national education studies. We hope the reports do not end up on a shelf or become a political football. (Ohio has had enough of this already.) Instead, we hope the reports stimulate more grass roots involvement in education. When parents and communities are ever vigilant and involved in their schools, they will get the educational excellence they expect.

Shirley Oehling is the director of the Parents' Network group Parent Representatives on Better Education (PROBE) in Ashland, Ohio. Sue Timmons, a former director of the same group, is now serving on the Ashland City Board of Education.

More reaction from PROBE and other NCCE members appears on page 5.

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The Paideia Proposal
Mortimer J. Adler (1982) 84pp softcover, MacMillan, $2.95.

Paideia from the Greek for the upbring of children, when applied to high school reform means every student will be exposed to a uniform curriculum, no electives. Plan addresses the dual problems of providing educational equity and raising standards.

Paideia Problems and Possibilities
Mortimer J. Adler (1983) 96pp softcover, MacMillan, $3.95.

This sequal to The Paideia Proposal answers many of the questions raised by the earlier work. Discussion includes clarifying principles in Paideia and overcoming difficulties of implementing such a plan.

Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and be Able to Do
(1983) 45pp softcover, The College Board, FREE. Send your name and address with your request for a copy to NCCE offices.

A description of the general skills students will need to succeed in college (reading, writing, speaking and listening, mathematics, reasoning and study) and the specific courses they should take in high school.

A Place Called School
John Goodlad (1983) 256pp, hardcover, McGraw/Hill, $18.95.

Eight-year study is largest on-the-scene probe of our schools ever undertaken. Findings based on interviews with teachers, students, administrators, school board officials, parents and other members of the community. All regions of the country and urban rural and suburban settings are represented. A realistic agenda for improvement.

America's Competitive Challenge: The Need for a National Response
American Council on Education Task Force of the Business-Higher Education Forum

A Study of High Schools
Theodore Sizer
National Association of Secondary School Principals
Commission on Educational Issues of the National Association of Independent Schools

The Need for Quality
Task Force on Higher Education and the Schools
The Southern Regional Education Board

The following reports are scheduled for publication in the next 1-3 years. Watch later issues of NETWORK for more information on their availability.

A Study of the American High School
Paul Houts
The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
The Arco Foundation

An Education of Value
The National Academy of Education

High School and Beyond
(first report 1983)
A National Longitudinal Study for the 1980's
U.S. Department of Education

The Study of Stanford University and the Schools
(report 1985)
Bank America Foundation
Lilly Endowment
David and Lucille Packard Foundation, et al